

THE FOUR T'S. SESSION ONE:
ARCHITECTURE OF JEWISH TIME

Rabbi Irwin Keller – Fall 2021

It is known that in the reality currently in place, there are three dimensions among others, labeled by the *Sefer Ytzirah* as follows: Space (*Olam*), Time (*Shanah*), and Person (*Nefesh*). *Olam* is defined by the four directions, up, and down; *Shanah* is time; and *Nefesh*, which is the unit of consciousness, is the form which lives within that space for a certain time. By way of these three dimensions, it is possible to measure everything in the universe, since they are the coordinates of reality.

Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi
Etz HaChayim shel Hamo'adim



Judaism is a religion of time aiming at the sanctification of time. Unlike the space-minded man to whom time is unvaried, iterative, homogeneous, to whom all hours are alike, quality-less, empty shells, the Bible senses the diversified character of time. There are no two hours alike. Every hour is unique and the only one given at the moment, exclusive and endlessly precious.

Judaism teaches us to be attached to holiness in time, to be attached to sacred events, to learn how to consecrate sanctuaries that emerge from the magnificent stream of a year. The Sabbaths are our great cathedrals; and our Holy of Holies is a shrine that neither the Romans nor the Germans were able to burn; a shrine that even apostasy cannot easily obliterate: the Day of Atonement. According to the ancient rabbis, it is not the observance of the Day of Atonement, but the Day itself, the “essence of the Day,” which, with man’s repentance, atones for the sins of man.

Jewish ritual may be characterized as the art of significant forms in time, as architecture of time. Most of its observances – the Sabbath, the New Moon, the festivals, the Sabbatical and the Jubilee year – depend on a certain hour of the day or season of the year. It is, for example, the evening, morning, or afternoon that brings with it the call to prayer. The main themes of faith lie in the realm of time. We remember the day of the exodus from Egypt, the day when Israel stood at Sinai; and our Messianic hope is the expectation of a day, of the end of days.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel
The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man



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CYCLES OF TIME

THE DAY —

As we learn from Torah, the Jewish day begins in the evening:

וַיְהִי־עָרֵב וַיְהִי־בֹּקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד:

Vay'hi erev vay'hi voker yom echad.

There was evening and there was morning: one day. (Genesis 1:5)

The hours of the day are marked by ritual moments.

Evening prayer (*ma'ariv*).

Bedtime Shema (*sh'ma al ha-mitah*).

Morning handwashing (*n'tilat yadayim*).

Morning prayer (*shacharit*) and *tefilin*.

Afternoon prayer (*minchah*).

The day is also marked by blessing practice upon eating, fulfilling *mitzvot*, or noticing wondrous things!

Some handy vocabulary:

Yom – day

Erev – evening

Laylah – night

PLANETARY INFLUENCES ON THE HOURS OF THE DAYS OF THE WEEK

| Hours | Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Shabbat |
|-------|---------|---------|---------|-----------|----------|---------|---------|
| 1 | Sun | Moon | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus | Saturn |
| 2 | Venus | Saturn | Sun | Moon | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter |
| 3 | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus | Saturn | Sun | Moon | Mars |
| 4 | Moon | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus | Saturn | Sun |
| 5 | Saturn | Sun | Moon | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus |
| 6 | Jupiter | Venus | Saturn | Sun | Moon | Mars | Mercury |
| 7 | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus | Saturn | Sun | Moon |
| 8 | Sun | Moon | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus | Saturn |
| 9 | Venus | Saturn | Sun | Moon | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter |
| 10 | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus | Saturn | Sun | Moon | Mars |
| 11 | Moon | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus | Saturn | Sun |
| 12 | Saturn | Sun | Moon | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus |

PLANETARY INFLUENCES ON THE HOURS OF THE NIGHTS OF THE WEEK

| Hours | Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Shabbat |
|-------|---------|---------|---------|-----------|----------|---------|---------|
| 1 | Jupiter | Venus | Saturn | Sun | Moon | Mars | Mercury |
| 2 | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus | Saturn | Sun | Moon |
| 3 | Sun | Moon | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus | Saturn |
| 4 | Venus | Saturn | Sun | Moon | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter |
| 5 | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus | Saturn | Sun | Moon | Mars |
| 6 | Moon | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus | Saturn | Sun |
| 7 | Saturn | Sun | Moon | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus |
| 8 | Jupiter | Venus | Saturn | Sun | Moon | Mars | Mercury |
| 9 | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus | Saturn | Sun | Moon |
| 10 | Sun | Moon | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus | Saturn |
| 11 | Venus | Saturn | Sun | Moon | Mars | Mercury | Jupiter |
| 12 | Mercury | Jupiter | Venus | Saturn | Sun | Moon | Mars |

From J. Jean Ajdler, “Talmudic Metrology VIII: Hours and Time Reckoning in Talmudic and Rabbinic Literature” (Bar Ilan University, 2016). Note that these are not uniform hours but “temporary hours.” That is, a daylight hour represents one twelfth of the duration of daylight on any given day, rather than one 24th of a day-night cycle. Sundials tell time using temporary hours. “Equinoctial hours” – i.e. 60-minute hours – only became commonly used with the building in wealthy towns of great clocks for their town squares beginning in the 11th Century.

The days of the week are clocked in relation to Shabbat, commemorating the completion of Creation. The week leads to Shabbat, then starts again. Shabbat is the culmination, restoration, and integration.

The first mention of ceasing from labor on the seventh day opens the second chapter of Genesis:

וַיָּכֹל הָשָׁמְיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל־צְבָאָם: וַיָּכֹל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְׁבִיעִי מִלְאַכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה
וַיִּשְׁבַּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְׁבִיעִי מִכָּל־מִלְאַכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: וַיְבָרֵךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־יּוֹם הַשְׁבִיעִי
וַיִּקְדְּשׁ אֹתוֹ כִּי בָּנֶ שְׁבָת מִכָּל־מִלְאַכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר־בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לְעֶשֶׂת:

Vay'khulu hashamayim v'ha'aretz v'khol tz'va'am. Vay'khal Elohim bayom hashvi'i m'lakhto asher asah vayishbot bayom hashvi'i mikol m'lakhto asher asah. Vay'varekh Elohim et yom hashvi'i vay'kadesh oto ki vo shavat mikol m'lakhto asher bara Elohim la'asot.

The heaven and the earth were finished, and all their array. On the seventh day God finished the work that He had been doing, and He ceased on the seventh day from all the work that He had done. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that He had done. (Genesis 2:1-3)

The commandment, or *mitzvah*, of **remembering** Shabbat occurs in the Ten Commandments as presented in Exodus 20:8-11.

The commandment, or *mitzvah*, of **keeping** Shabbat occurs in the repetition of the Ten Commandments found in Deuteronomy 5:12-13.

Shabbat as a **sign of covenant** between God and the Children of Israel is conveyed in Exodus 31:16-17:

וְשִׁמְרֻ בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-הַשְׁבָת לְעֶשֶׂת אֶת-הַשְׁבָת לְדֹرְתֶם בְּרִית עוֹלָם: בֵּין וּבֵין
בֵּין יִשְׂרָאֵל אֹזֶת הוּא לְעַלְם כִּי-שֶׁשֶׁת יָמִים עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֶת-הַשְׁמִינִים וְאֶת-הָאָרֶץ
וּבַיּוֹם הַשְׁבִיעִי שְׁבָת וַיַּנְפֵשׁ:

V'shamru V'nei Yisrael et ha-Shabat la'asot et ha-Shabat l'dorotam b'rit olam. Beyni uveyn B'nei Yisrael ot hi l'olam ki sheshet yamim asah Adonai et hashamayim v'et ha'aretz uvayom hashvi'i shavat vayinafash.

The Children of Israel shall keep (*v'shamru*) the sabbath, observing the sabbath throughout the ages as a covenant for all time. It shall be a sign for all time between Me and the Children of Israel. For in six days YHWH made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day ceased and was refreshed (*shavat vayinafash*).

Some kabbalistic views mark the journey of the soul over the week, placing Shabbat at the center, and showing how our souls ascend through the Four Worlds moving toward Shabbat, and descend back through those levels coming out of Shabbat. This places Shabbat as both the highest point and the *center* of a parabolic time curve:

| | | | | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|--|--|--|---|
| World: Atzilut Integrated Being Expansive Soul Tosefet NR”N | | | | Shabbat Observing/ Being in Shabbat | | | |
| World: B’riah Contemplative/Mystical Awareness Soul: Neshamah | | | Friday Sixth Day (Meditation/ Yichudim) | | Sunday First Day (Meditation/ Yichudim) | | |
| World: Yetzirah Speech, Linguistic Consciousness Soul: Ruach | | Thursday Fifth Day (Reading, Studying Torah) | | | | Monday Second Day (Reading, Studying Torah) | |
| World: Asiyah Embodied Awareness Soul: Nefesh | Wednesday Fourth Day (Embodied Mitzvot/Feet/ Shekhinah) | | | | | | Tuesday Third Day Embodied Mitzvot/Feet/ Shekhinah |

(From Rabbi Elliot Ginsburg, forthcoming work on *Shabbesdigkeit* – the presence of Shabbat in the everyday.)

Every day of the week has a traditional psalm that is recited:

Sunday: Psalm 24

Monday: Psalm 48

Tuesday: Psalm 82

Wednesday: Psalm 94 and the first three verses of Psalm 95

Thursday: Psalm 81

Friday: Psalm 93

Shabbat: Psalm 92

Some handy vocabulary:

Shavua – week

Shabbat – Sabbath

*Uv'yom simchat'khem uv'moadeykhem
 uv'rashei chod'sheykhem
 ut'ka'tem bachatzotzrot al 'oloteykhem
 v'al ziv'chey shalmeykhem
 v'hayu lakhem l'zikaron lifney Eloheykhem;
 ani YHWH Eloheykhem.*

וְבַיּוֹם שִׁמְחַתֶּכֶם וּבְמוֹעֵדֶיכֶם
 וּבְרָאשֵׁי חֲדַשִּׁיכֶם
 וַתִּקְרַעַתְּפָנֶם בְּחַצְצָרָתְּ עַל עַלְתִּיכֶם
 וְעַל זְבֻחֵי שְׁלֹמִיכֶם
 וְחַי לְכֶם לִזְבְּרוֹן לִפְנֵי אֱלֹהִיכֶם
 אָנָּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהִיכֶם:

And on your joyous occasions—your fixed festivals and new moon days—you shall sound the trumpets over your burnt offerings and your sacrifices of well-being. They shall be a reminder of you before your God: I, the LORD, am your God. (Numbers 10:10)

The first day of every Hebrew month is on the new moon. The full moon falls on the 14th of the month. Unlike secular holidays fixed to the solar calendar, Jewish holidays always take place on specific spots in the moon cycle. Rosh Hashanah (1 Tishrei) is always on the new moon. Pesach (15 Nisan), Sukkot (15 Tishrei) and Purim (14 Adar) are always on the full moon. Chanukah always spans a new moon (1 Tevet).

A Hebrew lunar year is 354 days long. Periodically there is a leap year (*shanah m'uberet*, or “pregnant year” in which an extra month is added before the month of Adar. A leap year occurs 7 times in a 19-year cycle, specifically, in years 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 17, and 19. This means that a leap month is added every 2 to 3 years. With a deviation of just a few hours, 19 solar years have very nearly the same length as 235 lunar months, both periods amounting to 6940 days.

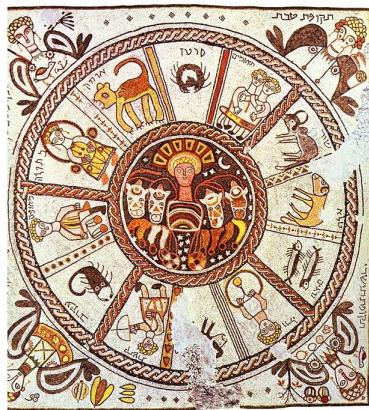
Ritual: the first day of the month is called Rosh Chodesh. We bless the new moon and, on the preceding Shabbat, announce the new month. Rosh Chodesh is considered in Talmud a full holiday for women, but only a half-holiday for men, because of a *midrash* about the women’s refusal to participate in the creation of the Golden Calf. But this probably is just a Talmudic justification of a longer historical association of the lunar cycle with the menstrual cycle, and the gatherings of communities of women on the new moon.



THE MONTHS OF THE YEAR

| Month | Month | Tribe | Season + | Holy Days, Festivals & Notes |
|----------|-----------|-----------|----------------------|--|
| Nisan | ניסן | Yehudah | Spring (Equinox) | First month of the year, per Torah. (But see Talmud quote, below.) The Festival of Passover (Pesach) begins on the eve of the 15th. The Counting of the Omer begins the next evening. |
| Iyyar | אייר | Yissachar | | Entire month sits within the Omer. Lag B'Omer, the 33rd day of the Counting, is on the 18th day of this month. |
| Sivan | סיוון | Zevulun | | The festival of Shavuot is on the 6th day of this month, the day that follows the 49 days of the Omer. |
| Tammuz | תמוז | Reuven | Summer (Solstice) | The 17th of Tammuz marks the breach of the walls of Jerusalem by the Romans. This marks the beginning of a 22-day period called <i>Beyn Hametzarim</i> , or “In the Narrows.” |
| Av | אב | Shimon | | <i>Beyn Hametzarim</i> culminates in Tisha B'Av, the 9th of Av, marking the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians and the Second Temple by the Romans. |
| Elul | אלול | Gad | | This is the penitential month bringing us into the High Holy Days. Special <i>selichot</i> prayers are recited. |
| Tishrei | תשרי | Efraim | Autumn (Equinox) | This entire month is filled with holy days. The 1st of Tishrei is Rosh Hashanah. Yom Kippur is the 10th of Tishrei. Sukkot begins on the 15th. Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah, launching the new cycle of Torah reading, are the 22nd (23rd in the Diaspora). |
| Cheshvan | חשבָן | Binyamin | | Every rabbi's favorite month – we just catch our breath! |
| Kislev | כִּסְלֹוּ | Menasheh | | Chanukah begins on the 25th of the month. |
| Tevet | טְבִיבָת | Dan | Winter (Solstice) | Chanukah concludes as the light of the moon returns. |
| Shevat | שְׁבָט | Asher | | The sap starts flowing. We celebrate plant life on Tu Bishvat, the 15th of Shevat. |
| Adar | אֲדָר | Naftali | | A month characterized by joyousness. The Fast of Esther is on the 13th day, and Purim is on the 14th. (Or the 15th in ancient walled cities.) In leap years, an additional month called Adar Aleph or Adar I is added before this month, and this month becomes known as Adar Bet or Adar II. Leap years take place 7 times over a 19-year cycle. |

THE CYCLE OF THE ZODIAC



Tekufat Nisan: Spring Equinox

Taleh (“ram”) – Aries

Shor (“bull”) – Taurus

T’omim (“twins”) – Gemini

Tekufat Tishrei: Fall Equinox

Moznayim (“scales”) – Libra

Akrav (“scorpion”) – Scorpio

Keshet (“bow”) – Sagittarius

Tekufat Tamuz: Summer Solstice

Sartan (“crab”) – Cancer

Aryeh (“lion”) – Leo

B’tulah (“virgin”) – Virgo

Tekufat Tevet: Winter Solstice

G’di (“kid”) – Capricorn

D’li (“water jug”) – Aquarius

Dagim (“fish”) – Pisces

THE CYCLE OF THE TORAH PORTIONS

Bereishit (Genesis): Bereishit. Noach. Lekh-lekha. Vayera. Chaye Sarah. Toldot. Vayetzei. Vayeshev. Vayishlach. Vayeshev. Miketz. Vayigash. Vayechi.

Shemot (Exodus): Shemot. Va’era. Bo. B’shalach. Yitro. Mishpatim. Terumah. Tetzaveh. Ki Tisa. Vayakhel. Pekudei.*

Vayikra (Leviticus): Vayikra. Tzav. Shemini. Tazria. Metzora.* Acharei Mot. Kedoshim. Emor. Behar. Bechukotai.*

Bemidbar (Numbers): Bemidbar. Naso. Beha’alotkha. Shlach. Korach. Chukat. Balak.* Pinchas. Matot. Mas’ei.*

Devarim (Deuteronomy): Devarim. V’et’chanan. Eikev. Re’eh. Shoftim. Ki Tetzei. Ki Tavo. Nitzavim. Vayelekh. Ha’azinu. V’zot Habrakhah.

* On non-leap years, this portion is read with the previous portion.



HAPPY NEW YEAR

Why settle for one? Talmud teaches us there are 4 new years:

אַרְבָּעָה רָאשִׁי שָׁנִים هֵם בַּאֲחָד בְּנִיסָן רָאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה לְמִלְכִים וּלְרָגִלים
בַּאֲחָד בְּאָלֹול רָאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה לְמַעֲשֵׂר בְּהַמָּה רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר וַרְבִּי שְׁמֻעוֹן אָוּמְרִים בַּאֲחָד בְּתִשְׁרֵי
בַּאֲחָד בְּתִשְׁרֵי רָאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה לְשָׁנִים וּלְשְׁמִיטָה וּלְיוֹבָלוֹת לְנִטְיעָה וּלְרִקּוֹת
בַּאֲחָד בְּשֶׁבֶט רָאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה לְאַילָן כְּדָבָרי בֵּית שְׁמַאי בֵּית הַלֵּל אָוּמְרִים בַּחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר בָּוֹ:

MISHNA: There are 4 new years—

The first of Nisan is the New Year for Kings (i.e. it is from this date that the years of a king's rule are counted), and for the Festivals (i.e. the beginning of the holiday calendar.)

The first of Elul is the New Year for animal tithes (i.e. animals born prior to that date are taxed with the previous tithe year; we moderns treat this as a New Year for animals overall). However, Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Shimon say the New Year for animal tithes is on the first of Tishrei.

The first of Tishrei is the New Year for counting years (i.e. for counting years leading to the *shmitah* year and the jubilee year) and for counting the years until a tree's produce may be harvested and for taxing produce.

The first of Shevat is the New Year for the trees (i.e. the fruit of a tree that was formed prior to that date belongs to the previous tax year and cannot be tithed together with fruit that was formed after that date). This is the rule according to the School of Shammai. However, the School of Hillel says the New Year for the trees is on the fifteenth of Shevat (Tu Bishvat).

— Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Rosh Hashanah 2a



CYCLES LONGER THAN A YEAR

SHMITAH AND YOVEL

Shmitah. Every 7th year is a “sabbatical” (*shabbaton*) year in which there are several types of relinquishment (*shmitah*) that take place. Fields (at least the ones in the Holy Land) are left fallow. No pruning, planting or harvesting. Whatever grows belongs to any person or beast who takes it. In the *shmitah* year, debts are also released.

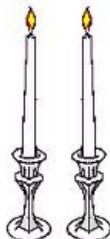
Yovel. The 50th year – i.e. the year following seven full *shmitah* cycles – is the “jubilee” (*yovel*) year. Indentures are released. Land conveyances are released. People return to their ancestral lands.

THE BLESSING OF THE SUN

Birkat HaChamah. Every 28 years the sun is considered to return to its position in the heavens as at the moment of its creation. A blessing is said at sunrise, called *Birkat HaChamah* – the Blessing of the Sun. Next *Birkat HaChamah* is on Wednesday morning, April 8, 2037. Calendar it up now!



SHABBAT



SHABBAT AT A GLANCE – שַׁבָּת

AKA: *Shabbos* (Ashkenazi pronunciation)

Date: Every Seventh Day

Duration: 25 hours

Themes: Completion. Integration. Rest.

Religious or Historic Significance:

Biblical References: See Weekly Cycle, above.

Rabbinic Development: Restrictions in permitted activity, including limitations on carrying between private and public spheres, walking distances, operating machinery, writing, engaging in business activities even if the particular actions would be permitted if not for business purposes.

Kabbalistic Themes: Taste of the World to Come; union of Shekhinah and the Holy One

Practices:

Lighting candles – welcoming Shabbat

Braided *challah* bread – preferably two loaves

Rest

Study

Communal prayer with Torah reading

Shabbat afternoon meal with singing and story (*seudah shlishit*)

Sex (presumed to be marital) is a double *mitzvah*

Release Shabbat with *havdalah* ceremony, including wine, spices and a braided candle



THE THREE PILGRIMAGE FESTIVALS

R'galim or Chagim: Laid out in Deuteronomy 16



PESACH AT A GLANCE – פסח

AKA: Passover

Date: 15 Nisan (full moon)

Duration: 7 days, 8 in the Diaspora

Earth-Based Elements: Spring. Planting. Lambing. Barley Harvest. Dew. Blood.

Themes: Liberation. Love. Birth.

Religious or Historic Significance:

Biblical Story: Exodus from Egypt

Cultic Practice: Lamb (paschal) sacrifice at the Temple in Jerusalem.

Rabbinic Innovation: Seder, retelling the Exodus story at home instead of offering sacrifice.

Kabbalistic Theme: *It'aruta dil'ma'lah* – an awakening of the Divine..

Practices:

Bi'ur chametz – removing all leavened products from the home

Seder Pesach – a shared meal, modeled on a Greek symposium, characterized by storytelling, reclining, and the eating of symbolic foods.

Eating of *matzah*.

Companion Text: *Shir Hashirim* (Song of Songs).



SHAVUOT AT A GLANCE – שַׁבְूּוֹת

AKA: Feast of Weeks

Date: 6 Sivan, the day following the 49-day Counting of the Omer (i.e. Day 50)

Duration: 1 day, 2 in the Diaspora

Earth-Based Elements: First fruits. Wheat harvest. Loaves. Milk.

Themes: Revelation. Marriage. Covenant. Divine-human connection.

Religious or Historic Significance:

Biblical Story: Giving of Torah at Mt. Sinai

Cultic Practice: Bringing of first fruits to the Temple in Jerusalem.

Practices:

Tikkun Leyl Shavuot – a custom since the late Middle Ages of staying up all night studying Torah.

Eating dairy products.

Companion Text: The Book of Ruth.



סוכות AT A GLANCE – Sukkot

AKA: Feast of Booths

Date: 15 Tishrei, 5 days after Yom Kippur

Duration: 7 days, plus an 8th day called *Shemini Atzeret*, followed by Simchat Torah in the Diaspora

Earth-Based Elements: Harvest. Rain. Water cycle. Nature. Four species.

Themes: Creation, re-creation. Fragility. Risk. Hope. Vulnerability. Detachment. Search for meaning. Also joy! (See Deuteronomy 16:14.)

Religious or Historic Significance:

Biblical Story: No clear Torah event. We “dwelt in Sukkot” (a place?) after leaving Egypt.

Cultic Practice: Pilgrimage to Jerusalem, building of *sukkot*.

Practices:

Building of and dwelling in a *sukkah* (plural: *sukkot*).

Simchat Beit Hashoevah (waterbearing festival) at the Temple in Jerusalem in antiquity.

Ushpizin – welcoming holy ancestral guests into the *sukkah*.

Arba'ah Minim (Four Species) – waving a bouquet of palm, willow, myrtle, and citron.

Hoshanot – walking of circles on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, the 7th day.

Companion Text: The Book of Ecclesiastes (*Kohelet*)

Additional Days of Celebration:

Shemini Atzeret – a separate holy day happening on the 8th day, in which we recite an annual prayer for rain. This holiday is considered the final conclusion of the High Holy Days, the last moment to atone, and an *et ratzon*, a time in which the Divine is well disposed to hearing our petitions.

Simchat Torah – on this day we celebrate the completion of our annual cycle of Torah reading. We dance with the Torah scrolls, and read both the end of Deuteronomy (death of Moshe) and the beginning of Genesis (“in the beginning...”).



THE HIGH HOLY DAYS

Yamim Nora'im – Days of Awe



ROSH HASHANAH AT A GLANCE – ראש השנה במבט אחד

AKA: New Year, *Yom HaDin* – Day of Judgment, *Yom T'ruah* – Day of the Shofar Blast

Date: 1 Tishrei

Duration: 1 day; 2 in the Diaspora

Themes and Images:

Teshuvah – “returning”, i.e. repentance or atonement or returning to a true path.

Din – judgment; we are held accountable for our actions.

Cheshbon HaNefesh – “reckoning of the soul.” We look inside and account for ourselves.

Sefer HaChayim – the Book of Life in which God writes our destinies for the next year.

Religious or Historic Significance:

Biblical Story: This day is commanded in Leviticus 23:23 as a day of blasting the shofar and resting. No other biblical significance identified.

Practices:

Synagogue ritual including special prayers and a shofar service.

Tashlikh – 2nd day ritual of casting crumbs on the water as a symbolic release of sins

Seder Rosh Hashanah – a home ritual blessing the year through symbolic foods

Texts:

Torah: On the first day of Rosh Hashanah, we read the Torah portion of the exile of Hagar from Abraham and Sarah's household. On the second day we read the *Akedah* – the near-sacrifice of Isaac.



YOM KIPPUR AT A GLANCE – יומם הכפורים

AKA: Day of Atonement, Sabbath of Sabbaths

Date: 10 Tishrei

Duration: 1 day

Themes and Images:

Teshuvah – “returning”, i.e. repentance or atonement or returning to a true path.

Sefer HaChayim – the Book of Life in which God now seals the destinies written on Rosh Hashanah.

The Gates – an image of gates closing at the end of the day; our petitions must go through them first.

Religious or Historic Significance:

Biblical Story: This day is commanded in Leviticus 23:26 and Number 29:7.

Elaborate ritual in the Temple in Jerusalem, including purification of the High Priest, the sacrifice of one goat and the sending of its twin into the wilderness, and the entering of the High Priest into the Holy of Holies.

Practices:

Synagogue ritual, including *Kol Nidre* – the annulment of vows on YK eve.

Special prayer elements – communal confessions (*Ashamnu* and *Al Chet*); an early afternoon *Avodah* service, imitating the High Priest’s entrance into the Holy of Holies and featuring a full-body prostration; and a *Neilah* service at the end of the day, in which the gates are imagined to be closing.

Asceticism – fasting, no bathing, no adornment, no wearing animal products, no sexual contact.

Texts:

The *haftarah* portion for Yom Kippur is, famously, the Book of Jonah.



RABBINIC HOLIDAYS

These are rabbinic holidays, i.e. not mandated in Torah but instituted later by rabbinic decision and popular custom.

TU BISHVAT

The new year of the trees, on the 15th of Shevat. Customs include planting trees and holding a Tu Bishvat seder.

PURIM

Based on the Book of Esther, retelling the salvation of the Jews of Persia, under the leadership of Queen Esther and Mordecai, against the plotting of Haman. Taking place on the 14th of Adar, ritual includes reading the *megillah*, the scroll of the Book of Esther; masquerading; intoxication; topsy-turviness; eating 3-cornered pastries (*hamentaschen* or *ozney haman*) in Ashkenazi communities; other treats in Mizrahi communities (for instance *ma'amul*); giving gifts of food to neighbors (*mishloach manot*).

TISHA B'AV

A holiday of mourning, marking the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE and the Second Temple in 70 CE, as well as several other catastrophes believed to have happened on the same date. Practices include fasting and reading the Book of Lamentations (*Eykah*).

CHANUKAH

Begins 25th of Kislev. Celebrating the successful Maccabean revolt against the Seleucid Greeks and rededication of the Temple in the 2nd Century BCE. Based on the Book of Maccabees (not part of the Hebrew Bible). Besides the military victory, Chanukah lore includes the miracle of the lamp of the Temple staying lit for 8 days despite there not being enough oil for even one. Ritual includes lighting candles (an increasing or decreasing number) each night for 8 days; playing with a top called a *dreydl* in Yiddish or *s'vivon* in Hebrew; and eating fried foods (potato *latkes* in Ashkenazi communities in the Diaspora; *sufganiyot* or jelly donuts in Israel).



MODERN HOLIDAYS

These are modern holidays, developed in the 20th Century.

YOM HASHOAH

A commemoration of the Holocaust (*Shoah*) – memorializing loss of life and remembering heroism. The date, the 27th of Nisan, was selected by the Israeli Knesset in 1951. There is no set ritual for Yom HaShoah; observances are generally established by local communities. Recitation of *kaddish* and *El Malei Rachamim* is customary. In Israel, many business are closed, flags are flown at half mast, and a siren in the morning initiates 2 minutes of silence.

YOM HA'ATZMAUT

A commemoration of the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, usually observed on the 5th of Iyar. The date marks the declaration, on May 14, 1948, of independence by the State of Israel, hours before the end of the British Mandate. Yom Ha'atzmaut is preceded by a memorial day for fallen Israeli soldiers called Yom Hazikaron.

In response to Yom Ha'Atzmaut, Palestinian communities hold May 15 as a day of mourning, called Naqba Day.

BIRKAT HALEVANAH (SEASONS OF THE MOON)

*Nisan, Iyar, Sivan, Tammuz,
Av, Elul, Tishrei, Heshvan,
Kislev, Tevet, Sh'vat, Adar;
B'rukhan ha-m'chadeshet kol eyt.*

A sliver, a quarter, a half, then full light,
Revealing yourself in the darkness of night,
And we go round and round and round,
And we go round and round

This is the cycle, the rhythm of time,
Days turn to weeks into months into years.
And we go round and round and round,
And we go round and round.

A sliver, a quarter, a half, then full heart,
Revealing the mysteries that set us apart,
And we go round and round and round,
And we go round and round

Earth sleeps in the winter, awakening spring.
Light kisses the summer, igniting the fall,
And we go round and round and round
And we go round and round.

A sliver, a quarter, a half, and then whole,
Renewed by Your presence, touching the soul,
And we go round and round and round,
and we go round and round.

It is new, it is ours, we see it again.
Ha-hodesh hazeh, kodesh laken
And we go round and round and round,
And we go round and round

A sliver, a quarter, a half, then full light,
Revealing yourself in the darkness of night,
And we go round and round and round,
And we go round and round

(Music: Debbie Friedman; Lyrics: Debbie Friedman & Tamara Ruth Cohen)



FURTHER READING

Rabbi Arthur Waskow, *Seasons of Our Joy: A Handbook of Jewish Festivals* (1982).

Rabbi Wayne Dosick, *Living Judaism: The Complete Guide to Jewish Belief, Tradition, and Practice* (1995)

Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, *Jewish Literacy: The Most Important Things to Know about the Jewish Religion, Its People, and Its History* (1991)